

Site Search

On Sale Today!

Complete Home Theater
From \$999Stereo
From \$239

web magazine for music, audio & home theater

more hi-res disc reviews than any other publication

Home
SACD/Hi-Res
Audio News
Component
Special Features
Classical
Classical Reissues
DVD/Blu-ray
Dual Disc
Pop/Rock/World
Jazz CDs
Editorial
Reviews Index
Audio Links
Past Issues
Reader Feedback
Register to Win
Site Map
Best Discs of Year
Staff Bios
John Sunier Bio

DVD & Blu-ray Video Reviews

James "Blood" Ulmer – Solos: The Jazz Sessions (2010)*This particular Solos: The Jazz Sessions offers an intimate look at James "Blood" Ulmer's music and ideas.*

Published on August 10, 2010

**James "Blood" Ulmer – Solos: The Jazz Sessions (2010)****Studio: MVD Visual MVD5012D****Video: 16x9 Color****Audio: DD 5.1 Surround****All regions****Length: 49:46 (bonus 3:24)****Rating: ******

There are many videos to recommend from the DVD series *Solos: The Jazz Sessions*, which initially aired on Canadian television.

This particular title features iconoclastic guitarist James "Blood"

Ulmer, who has fluently traveled from free jazz to blues to rock to funk and has, since starting his career in the late 1950s – like his hero Jimi Hendrix – revealed innovative things that can be done with six strings.

While many Ulmer performances can be marked by hard-edged, amplified sharpness, the seven tracks on this intimate presentation showcase Ulmer's quieter side, underlining his melodies, nuance and subtlety. This stripped down convention is rare but not unprecedented: Ulmer utilized a similar perspective on *Birthright* (2005), his singular examination of American blues.

Solos opens with a version of his noted social awareness discourse, "Are You Glad to Be in America?," which matches the style and character of the semi-acoustic Delta blues translation he did on his album *No Escape from the Blues: The Electric Lady Sessions* (2003). This is a rewarding way to begin because it's an audience favorite and the rendition sets the tone for the rest of the nearly 50-minute program. The biting lyrics remain as relevant as when this piece was released over three decades ago. The only criticism is the short length: when Ulmer plays this with a band the cut carries more muscular weight missing from a single strummed guitar. From the same blues-drenched *Electric Lady* outing, Ulmer also reinterprets his autobiographical effort, "Satisfy (Story of My Life)," which displays Ulmer's talent for using Southern blues motifs as a touchstone for his own material.

Spontaneity has been Ulmer's means to an end since he was mentored by Ornette Coleman and became an exponent of Coleman's Harmelodic theory, a system that regards the elements of harmony, rhythm and melody in equivalent measures. Ulmer's musical freedom bears fruit during a softly textured take of "Black Sheep," earlier heard on his 1986 release, *America: Do You Remember the Love?* It's a little-known but beautifully effective creation with a shifting evolution that demonstrates Ulmer's low-key methodology. Another understated surprise is Ulmer's flute exercise, the previously unavailable "Secret," which imparts a distinctive tonal quality. While Ulmer's flute will never offer the kind of authority his guitar furnishes, the flute interlude conveys an



Ads by Google

Rock & Roll After School

Ages 7-17
Lessons, Bands,
Summer Camp
rockandrollafterschool.com

Blues Radio-Listen Free

Listen to
Blues-Free Free
Unlimited
Listening!
www.pandora.com

Jazz Internet Radio

Listen To Jazz
Music Free Online.
Huge Variety of
Jazz Stations.
UltraSmoothJazz.com

Find Jazz Music Jobs-Free

100+ Jazz Job
openings for String
Keyboards,
Drums, Horns &
Vocals
ExploreTalent.com/Jazz_

intriguing side to Ulmer's musical personality.

Ulmer's unassuming conversant beliefs are disclosed during brief interview segments placed between performances, which give the film a firm framing. The anecdotes and statements provide useful background information, such as why Ulmer now uses the flute as a creative tool.

The video and audio are superb, which is a hallmark of this DVD series. Detailed close-ups afford fans the opportunity to check out Ulmer's fretboard fingering; the lighting is choreographed in restrained but expert ways; and the production as a whole supplies the video an authoritative sheen. The 5.1 Surround sound emphasizes Ulmer's reserved junctures so viewers can enjoy even the most subdued moments.

Bonus features are slim: a 3:24 promotional clip for a different *Solos: The Jazz Sessions* DVD program for guitarist John Abercrombie.

-- Doug Simpson

Copyright © Audiophile Audition
All rights Reserved

[Email your Opinions](#) on this article to AUDIOPHILE AUDITION!

[Email this page](#) to a friend. View a [printer-friendly version](#).

[Ads by Google](#) [Jazz Festival](#) [Jazz Standards](#) [Blues Guitar](#) [Jazz Scales](#)